Subject: Flooding risk in the Thames Gateway

Report Number: 6

Report to: Planning and Spatial Development Committee

Date: 5 September 2007

Report of: Executive Director of Secretariat

1. Recommendation

1.1 To note the contents of this report as background for a short discussion with Swenja Surminski, Policy Adviser Climate Change, Association of British Insurers on the flooding risk in the Thames Gateway.

2. Background

2.1 During the summer recess the Chairman requested that representatives of the Association of British Insurers (ABI) be invited to this meeting to discuss recent flooding events and the implications for flooding in the Thames Gateway.

2.2 Widespread flooding hit Northern Ireland, Wales and most areas of northern England and the midlands during June and July. The ABI has released new figures on the cost of these floods, and the number of claims received, which break down as follows:

- Total cost: approaching £3bn;
- Total number of claims: almost 60,000;
- Total domestic claims: 45,000;
- Total commercial claims: 14,500.

2.3 The Assembly has produced two reports on the issue of flooding risk in London. The first “Flooding in London” in November 2002 examined the three main flooding risks to London - the Thames Tide, rivers and sewers - and assessed both the extent of the risk and how it will be affected by the impact of climate change. It identified that the most immediate risks are from the drainage system and from certain stretches of the Thames and its tributaries as a consequence of heavy rainfall. The report made recommendations on the gathering of more comprehensive information on flood risk to London, on the need to improve our emergency
preparedness, on how best to minimise the dangers of flooding in a sustainable way, on post-
flood recovery and insurance cover.

2.4 In October 2005 the Assembly’s Environment Committee produced a report entitled “London under threat?” - flooding risk in the Thames Gateway. The report described the huge potential impact that flooding could have in the Thames Gateway with 1.25 million people at risk. The report considered the options for reducing flood risk and recommended measures for improving London’s resilience to flooding including that the Mayor should strengthen his planning guidance for the area and that funding must be identified quickly to improve defences.

2.5 Large parts of the Thames Gateway are within the natural floodplain of the tidal Thames and significant areas are within the natural floodplains of tributary rivers. The Environment Agency is preparing a strategy for Flood Management in the Thames Estuary up to 2100. This should be available in 2008.

2.6 The East London Sub-regional Development Framework (May 2006) identifies distinctive strategic issues facing East London including the need to manage flood risk, particularly of tidal flooding and plan carefully for environmental infrastructure including water resources and sewage.

2.7 All developments should be protected to a minimum standard of 1 in 1000 return period (0.1% per year) for tidal flooding with no deterioration of this level of protection over the lifetime of the development.

2.8 London enjoys the highest level of flood protection in the UK. The majority of London is protected by the Thames Barrier and the Environment Agency has said that the Barrier will continue to provide protection up to the level of 1 in 1000 until 2030 after which the level of protection will decrease but still provide a level of protection higher than anywhere else in the country.¹

2.9 Recent questions to the Mayor have dealt with how the flood risk in the Thames Gateway is being addressed strategically and the possibility that rising flood risk in development areas like the Gateway may make securing insurance more difficult and expensive. In the Mayor’s view there are around 12,000 homes in the Barking Reach area which are to be developed on potentially vulnerable land in the Gateway. This area will require flood defences to be strengthened.

3. The Association of British Insurers

3.1 The ABI (Association of British Insurers) represents the collective interests of the UK’s insurance industry. The Association speaks on issues of common interest; helps to inform and participate in debates on public policy issues; and also acts as an advocate for high standards of customer service in the insurance industry.

¹ http://www.london.gov.uk/assembly/reports/environment/flooding-env-agency-letter.pdf
Responding to the publication of the Government Housing Green Paper (July 2007) the ABI said that new housing developments must be built away from flood-prone areas to ensure that flood insurance continues to remain widely available and competitively priced.

In areas of low and moderate risk, where Environment Agency data indicates the annual probability of flooding is less than a 1.3% (1 in 75) chance taking flood defences into account, ABI members will offer flood cover in the normal way on buildings and contents policies to homeowners and small businesses.

In significant risk areas where no improvements in permanent defences are planned or feasible and the annual chance of flooding is more than 1.3% (1 in 75), insurers will not guarantee to provide cover in all cases.

Given the growing impact of climate change and the possibility of extreme climatic events Members may wish to discuss with the ABI how the models used to assess insurance risk are being updated and what effect this may have, if any, for existing and new housing and businesses in the Thames Gateway.

4. **Strategy Implications**

The Mayor’s London Plan and the Further Alterations to the London Plan contain a suite of policies that require boroughs to manage flood risk through their planning policies. Strategic flood risk assessments have been undertaken for the Gateway and more detailed flood risk assessments for priority development areas.

5. **Legal Implications**

Under s59 Greater London Authority Act 1999 the Assembly has the power to keep under review the exercise by the Mayor of his statutory functions. The powers of the Assembly include the power to investigate and prepare reports about:

- Any actions and decisions of the Mayor;
- Any actions and decisions of any member of staff of the Authority;
- Matters relating to the principal purposes of the Authority;
- Matters in relation to which statutory functions are exercisable by the Mayor, and
- Any other matters which the Assembly considers to be of importance to Greater London.

Section 54(1) of the GLA Act enables the Assembly to arrange for any of its functions to be discharged by a committee or sub-committee of the Assembly or by a single member of the Assembly.
6. **Financial Implications**

6.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

**Background Documents:**

Flooding in London, London Assembly, November 2002
[http://www.london.gov.uk/assembly/reports/environment/flooding.pdf](http://www.london.gov.uk/assembly/reports/environment/flooding.pdf)

London under threat? Flooding risk in the Thames Gateway, London Assembly Environment Committee, October 2005

Draft minutes of Mayors Questions 18 July 2007

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